

The Joy of Purim: Costumes, Shpiels and Practical Jokes

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Introduction

1. Talmud, Pesachim 109a

A man is obligated to gladden his household for the holiday, as it is written, "And you shall be joyous on your holiday..." What does one purchase for women? Rabbi Yosef taught: In Bavel, colored garments. In Israel, garments of pressed flax.

2. Rashi to Succah 45a מיד, ואוכלין

The adults would remove the lulavim of the children from their hands on the seventh, and eat the etrogim of the children. There was no theft and no issue of peaceful conduct, for they did this in *simchah*.

Purim Costumes

3. R' Kalonymus ben Kalonymus, *Even Bochan*, pg. 30

And on the fourteenth of Adar, for the sake of honor and beauty, young men are glorified and exalted, acting in a manner of insanity and foolishness... One wears a woman's dress and a necklace about his throat, one acts like one of the fools, with a drum and a dance and joy...

4. Talmud, Megilah 12a

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai told his students: The Jews only participated for show, and Gd only threatened them for show.

5. Megilat Esther

4:1-3 – And Mordechai knew all that had happened, and Mordechai tore his garments and donned sackcloth and ashes, and he went out into the city and he cried out a great, bitter cry. And he came up to the king's gate, for one could not enter the king's gate wearing sackcloth. In every land, wherever the king's decree and law reached, there was great mourning for the Jews, and fasting and wailing and eulogizing. Sackcloth and ashes were distributed to the masses.

8:15 - And Mordechai departed from before the king in royal garments of techelet and white, and a great gold crown and a cloak of purple wool and fine linen, and the city of Shushan was ecstatic and joyous.

6. Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Idolatry 12:10

A woman should not put men's garments on herself, such as by placing a man's hat or turban on her head, or wearing armor or similar things, or shaving her head as a man would. A man should not put women's garments on himself, such as by wearing colored garments or gold ornaments in places where only women wear such implements. It is all based on local practice.

7. R' Yoel Sirkes, *Bach Yoreh Deah* 182

There are two possible leniencies:

One is in that the prohibition only applies to matters of beautification and ornamentation...but if one wears such clothing to guard one's self from the sun during the summer or from rain during the rainy season, there is no prohibition...

The second leniency is that even if one does wear such clothes in order to imitate the opposite gender, it is only prohibited to wear clothing which is made for beauty or ornamentation...

8. R' Judah Mintz, *Responsum* #15

So, too, in our case, one does not intend to wear this for immorality, but rather to enhance the joy of Purim. Therefore, just as they did not erect a fence regarding theft since it is only for two nights and a day, so, too, here; theft and adultery emerge from the same root in a person's nature.

Purim Shpiels

9. R' Natan baal ha'Aruch, *Aruch*, שו"ר

On the days of Purim, the global custom is for young men to make an image of Haman and suspend it from the rooftops for four or five days, and then on Purim to make a bonfire and throw the image into it. They stand around it and sing, and they have a ring suspended above the fire, and people jump [through it] from one side of the fire to the other.

10. Talmud, Bava Metzia 58b

All who descend to Gehennom also ascend, except three: One who lives with another's wife, one who embarrasses another in public, and one who creates a negative nickname for another.

Purim Practical Jokes

11. R' Moshe Isserles, *Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chaim 696:8

People who grab from each other in a manner of joy do not violate "Do not steal." This is the practice, but only so long as one does not do anything violating municipal edicts.

12. R' Yechiel Michel Epstein, *Aruch haShulchan*, Orach Chaim 696:12

One who harmed must pay, for today, due to our great sins, all joy is dimmed and we are not on this level.

13. R' Moshe Isserles, *Shulchan Aruch*, Choshen Mishpat 378:9

Still, if it appears to the court that they should create a fence against this, they are so empowered.

14. Schramm, *When fun snowballs into anger*, Washington Post 12-23-09

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2009/12/22/ST2009122202681.html>

You may be familiar with The Great Snowball Incident of 2009. The Post put the story on its front page, and it appeared on CNN, Fox and other major media outlets. This mostly friendly gathering at the corner of 14th and U streets NW began harmlessly enough. But things got ugly when the combatants pelted the personal vehicle of a D.C. police detective.

15. Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchot Geneivah 1:2

Biblically, one may not steal any amount. One may not steal in the manner of playing, or with intent to return it, or with intent to pay. All of these are prohibited, lest one accustom himself to such conduct.